

AgEcon Search: An international disciplinary repository

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AgEcon Search, <http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/> is a discipline-oriented repository that includes over 32,000 working papers, conference papers, and journal articles from 170 organizations in 35 countries. Although all abstracts and the majority of the papers are in English, 10 languages are represented. It has been in existence since 1995.

As the name implies, it covers agricultural economics, but the focus is actually the broader field of applied economics, which covers agricultural, development, energy, environmental, and resource economics and policy. Labor and health economics may also be included.

AgEcon Search now runs on DSpace, which is its third platform. The two previous ones were developed locally. Programmers have adapted the software in various ways, such as making it accommodate the structure of journals, and adjusting the submission form to mimic the one in the previous platform.

Academic institutions represent the largest number of organizations that contribute their papers to AgEcon Search. Departments of agricultural and applied economics have a “pre-print culture”, manifested in a long tradition of producing working papers, which were distributed via mail to other departments until the mid 1990s. These departments often have research centers that produce various papers and reports.

Professional societies are another category of contributors to AgEcon Search. The Agricultural and Applied Economics Association (AAEA), the largest professional association in the United States, is a co-sponsor of AgEcon Search, along with the Department of Applied Economics and the University Libraries at the University of Minnesota, where AgEcon Search is housed.

The involvement of societies has been critical to the success of AgEcon Search. When economists give a talk at a conference, a full paper (often 20-35 pages) is almost always produced in conjunction with the talk. In 1998, the AAEA began requiring that authors submit these papers to AgEcon Search about two months before the conference. If they failed to do so, they were dropped from the program. The motivation of the society was to press authors for high-quality papers that were prepared well in advance of the meeting. The papers have become very popular with conference attendees, who can read them ahead of time, and come with relevant questions or comments.

Other agricultural and applied economics associations have followed suit, including the large international group, regional ones such as the European, African and Australian, and many based in individual countries. Government agencies contribute material, as

do a small number of non-governmental organizations, including several associated with the United Nations.

Although recruitment of material has not been a simple task, it has not been the challenge that has faced many institutional repositories. As with many faculty members and researchers, economists are very loyal to their profession, and they see AgEcon Search as a project tied very closely to that profession. It has name recognition among the international community of economists.

Peer pressure among institutions has played an important role in recruitment of material. The Italian agricultural economics group finally began sending their conference papers after they discovered the comparable German group was submitting theirs, and the same situation occurred with a few academic departments in the United States.

A weekly e-mail which reaches about 3000 economists highlights selected new papers in AgEcon Search, with links to the full text.

One of the most effective methods for promoting AgEcon Search as well as recruiting new material has been to attend conferences of agricultural and applied economists and have an exhibit. Use of AgEcon Search is also promoted at these meetings. Much of the work of applied economists is done in the developing world, and there has been a concerted effort to gather documents written by researchers in those areas, although there is still much room for growth.

AgEcon Search has been lucky to have several champions within the profession, most of whom sit on the Advisory Board.

There are 29 journals that contribute their material to AgEcon Search. Most are small press journals with limited circulation, and for many, it is the only Web presence for their papers. Examples of journals are:

- APSTRACT: Applied Studies in Agribusiness and Commerce
- Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics
- Journal of Food Distribution Research
- Marine Resource Economics

Some volumes go back to the 1940s, and several of the journals obtained grants to cover the cost of digitizing the older volumes. A few of the journals have embargos of one or two years, although some have dropped them recently.

For two of the more prestigious journals in the field, AgEcon Search does not have the articles, but it does house a number of lengthy appendices associated with articles in the journals. These tend to get fairly heavy use, and other journals have inquired about the possibility of including their extended appendices.

AgEcon Search runs on a very small budget, and is, as the economists would say, a distributed network. Each of the groups uploads their own papers, or makes arrangements to have students at the host institution do it for them, on a cost recovery basis. Several small grants have covered the costs of special projects, such as gathering and uploading collections of older papers from the Web sites of participating groups.

Projects planned for the near future include actively recruiting pre-prints and post-prints from journals that allow that practice, investigating the inclusion of theses and dissertations, and recruiting more papers from Africa.